

What is claimed is:

- 5 1. A magnetic random access memory (MRAM) device
 comprising:
 an array of magnetic memory cells;
 a plurality of word and bit lines connecting
 columns and rows of the memory cells, each memory
10 cell having a magnetic reference layer and a magnetic
 data layer, each reference layer and each data layer
 having a magnetization being switchable between two
 states under the influence of a magnetic field; and
 a plurality of heating elements each proximate
15 to a respective reference layer, each heating element
 in use providing for localized heating of the
 respective reference layer so as to reduce the
 coercivity of the reference layer to facilitate
 switching of the reference layer without switching of
20 the data layers.
2. The MRAM of claim 1, wherein:
 each reference layer has at a first temperature a
 coercivity that is lower than that of each data layer
25 at the first temperature.
3. The MRAM of claim 1, wherein:
 each heating element is a heat-inducing layer.
- 30 4. The MRAM of claim 3, wherein:
 each heat-inducing layer is a resistive layer.
5. The MRAM of claim 3, wherein:
 each heat inducing-layer is a dielectric layer

through which in use a tunneling current is directed.

6. The MRAM of claim 1, wherein:
each heating element is a diode.

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7. The MRAM of claim 4, wherein:
the resistive layer comprises at least one of of the
materials Si, Ge, Se, C, SiC, TaO₂, WSi, CoSi, FeSi,
PtSi, TaN, FeAlN and SiN.

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8. The MRAM of claim 5, wherein:
the dielectric layer comprises at least one of the
materials Al₂O₃, AlN, SiO₂, Si₃N₄, BN, MgO and Ta₂O₅.

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9. The MRAM of claim 6, wherein:
the diode comprises at least one of amorphous silicon
and single crystalline silicon.

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10. The MRAM of claim 1, wherein:
each memory device is a tunneling magneto-resistance
(TMR) memory device.

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11. A computer system comprising:
a central processing unit,
a main board coupled to the central processing
unit and magnetic memory devices coupled to the main
board, each magnetic memory device comprising:
an array of magnetic memory cells;
a plurality of word and bit lines
connecting columns and rows of the memory
cells, each memory cell having a magnetic
reference layer and a magnetic data layer, each
reference layer and each data layer having a

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magnetization being switchable between two states under the influence of a magnetic field; and

5 a plurality of heating elements each proximate to a respective reference layer and in use providing for localized heating of the respective reference layer so as to reduce the coercivity of the reference layer to facilitate switching of the respective reference layer
10 without switching of the data layers.

12. A method for operating an MRAM device the device comprising an array of MRAM cells switchable between two states under the influence of a magnetic field,
15 each MRAM cell having a reference layer and a data layer, the method comprising the steps of:

 heating at least one reference layer; and
 utilizing the generated heat to reduce the coercivity of the at least one reference layer and
20 facilitate switching of the at least reference layer without switching of the data layers.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein:
 the step of heating of the at least one reference
25 layer comprises directing a current through a heat-inducing layer.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein:
 the step of heating the at least one reference layer
30 comprises directing a current through a resistive heat-inducing layer.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein:

the step of heating the at least one reference layer comprises directing a tunneling current through a dielectric layer.